

Forthcoming Columbia College Institute to Celebrate Roles of Women

By Jennifer Sabella - The Columbia Chronicle

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Columbia College will soon be home to the first and only Institute for the Study of Women and Gender in Arts and Media in the country.

While women's studies programs thrive in colleges nationwide, the institute will be the first to offer information focusing primarily on the arts and media.

Cheryl Johnson-Odim, dean of the School of Liberal Arts and Sciences, along with Ellen Stone-Belic, a member of Columbia's board of trustees, worked with other faculty members to develop the institute.

"[The institute] has been a dream of many women at Columbia," Johnson-Odim said. "This is certainly a dream come true."

Unlike the Women and Gender Studies minor, the institute will not offer degrees. Instead, Johnson-Odim said, it will work to bring in guest speakers and artists in residence. It will also develop and plan public programs that celebrate women's roles in the arts and media community.

"We're hoping curriculum will be developed by faculty and students," Johnson-Odim said.

She wants the institute to inspire teachers to spend more time analyzing the importance of gender in the different areas of study at Columbia. She pointed out that some departments-such as Film and Video, Photography, and Art and Design-have classes that already focus on gender.

After extensive planning, a committee of faculty and staff was assembled, and it started looking

for a director to head up the program. By early October, the committee narrowed down its list of candidates from 80 applicants to four women.

Jillana Enteen, Charlotte Saenz, Jane Saks and Amy Shore make up the four candidates chosen as possible directors of the institute.

Johnson-Odim said the committee is presenting its recommendations to the Office of the President and will have a director chosen soon.

While the location for the institute is still unknown, its mission is clear.

"The institute will carry out its activities by fostering research and analysis, curriculum development, public programming and a visiting artist and media professional program," Johnson-Odim said.

Funding for the institute came from private donors, as well as a grant from Congress. U.S. Congresswomen Judy Biggert and **Jan Schakowsky** support the institute and helped in attaining the grant.

The response to the institute has been limited, since everything is just falling into place, but the few people who know about it are excited, Johnson-Odim said.

The institute is starting small and working its way up.

"Initially, there will just be a director and an administrative assistant," Johnson-Odim said.

She wants faculty, staff and students to get involved with the institute to help bring the topic of women and gender in the arts and media into Columbia classrooms and beyond. She hopes their work will reach K-12 classrooms and ignite community interest.

"This new institute will be just another way in which Columbia distinguishes itself in arts and media education, production and scholarship," Johnson-Odim said.